Ever wonder how 20,000 books ended up in the African Bush? This is the entire story as told by Sarah, the dreamer and leader who made 200 books multiply by 100.

The last 6 months have been incredible, some of the best and stretching of my life, and it all started with a "yes" and some knocking. In order to tell you where we are, I have to tell you where we have been.

I have been dreaming and working along side 2 of my friends, Chris and Jenn Hadsell, since 2012. We all met college together years before at Lee University in Cleveland, TN. When they invited me to join them in 2012 on a trip to South Sudan, my life changed.



Yei Children's Village, South Sudan 2012



Walking across the border from Uganda into South Sudan

A few days prior to meeting up with me, they met a pastor and a group of women on the coast of Kenya. These women were mamas with HIV/Aids and a part of a support group called "I Do Not Reject Myself." Their biggest dream was to get their kids into school and Chris and Jenn did just that.

The Hadsell's walked out of the room after meeting with these mamas, realizing they had just committed at least 18 years of their lives to helping their kids. They immediately started a sponsorship program for the kids and put them into the growing school of the pastor, Christopher, whom they just met. Sponsorship includes tuition, books, uniforms, 2 meals a day, discipleship, and helps pay the teachers better.



Jenn with the sponsorship kids after 1 year

This school is located in a town in on the coast of Kenya known for prostitution. Many of the girls were brought out of this and into school. School starts early and ends late simply to protect and keep the kids from the many options of the streets.

For the last 4 years they have been fostering education and discipleship. The school has grown in numbers and size- classrooms have been added and the church rebuilt to support the increase. As the school grew they hired a teacher named Patrick, who was from a remote village about 2 hours away. He told Chris and Jenn about this land that had been skipped over by many, but had received a prophesy 20 years before that it was going to be a beacon of light to the area.

In October 2014, the Hadsell's traveled with Patrick and Pastor Chris to the area where they were greeted by the village and their elders. The village elder, known as the Mzee (pronounced Mizay), was an 80 something year old Muslim man who after tea, lunch, and a meeting, offered them 15 acres of land free and clear in promise that they'd build a Christian church and a school. They couldn't believe the offer, and realized that they had the option to say yes and take part in something that could be bigger than they imagined. They wholeheartedly agreed, and a meeting was scheduled for January for the official deeds and paperwork to be signed and handed over.

Chris and Jenn in front of the one room school that grew from 30 to almost 200 kids in a matter of 1 year

During this trip, after sponsoring children in his school for over 2 years, Pastor Christopher asked the Hadsell's for help to support his teachers in the classroom. They extended an invitation to me and our new friend, Dusty, to become educational coordinators and join in partnering with schools and their organization, Retouch. We started with a game plan of doing a 3 day teacher training to increase engagement and depth of knowledge and get to know the schools better.

We went in January 2015 to do our first teacher training alongside Chris and Jenn. We had 3 days of intense training from 8 am - 6 pm with the teachers and spent the remaining days learning about the school and community.

Pastor and Patrick at the 1st teacher training using chalkboards created by American elementary students.

The day after the training finished we went out to the remote land where we had a celebration with the village, and received the official deed for the land. Over a plate of goat in the one room mud nursery, they decided we should hire some of the teachers from the training, including Patrick, and start a school- the following Monday! They went out, shared the news with the village, told them to make sure their kids were clean, and to arrive in the morning- text books, uniforms, and supplies to follow. Most days we eat the elephant one bite at a time, some days it's a whole leg.

Ceremony at Birikani with the village and elders 2015

During the next 6 months, the nursery grew from 30 kids into a school of over 100 kids, more classrooms were added, a church was planted, and the Mzee seeing all of the change happening began to believe in Jesus. The

village whose name used to Mwabila, which literally means mold, changed their name to Birikani, which roughly means door or port, to mirror the prophesy that they would welcome new things.



Birikani

By June of 2015, we had 2 thriving schools and for our next teacher training, we brought 300 books over in our suitcases to start the first library at Pastor Christopher's school in Mtwapa. I told the teachers once we finished, that if the books looked knew when we came back, no more would come. By October many of the books were shredded at the seams.



First Library/Computer lab in the village



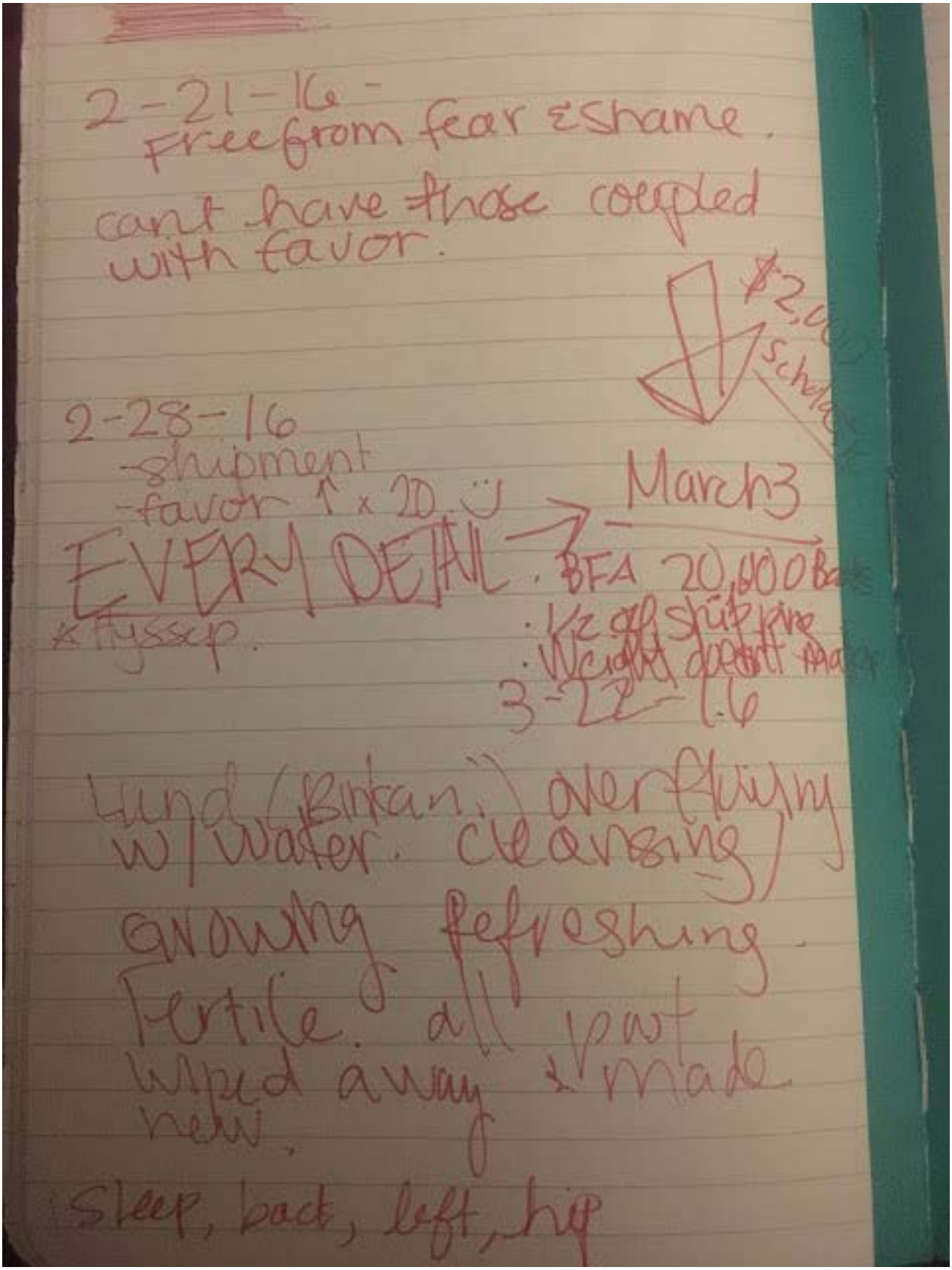
300 books felt like 3,000,000 at the time. Little did we know what a year later would hold!

In late January of 2016, Jenn and I were talking on the phone about bringing more books and realized that if we wanted to see greater growth, taking things over by suitcases alone wasn't enough. We agreed that we would look into the option of shipping, but also knowing in our guts that our budget couldn't truly support a shipment. However, that did not stop us looking at possibilities just to see what was out there. I spent every evening over the next 3 weeks calling anybody and everybody who had shipped and said they shipped to Kenya. Looking for a shipping company felt like looking for a needle in a haystack. Who could we trust to get our stuff there safely without ripping us off? We get get it there, but how do we get it out? Many of the companies couldn't give us realistic quotes because we didn't know the exact dimensions and weight of what we would want to ship, as donations were constantly trickling in. The quotes ranged from $10,000-40,000 just to get it to the port, not including taxes and freight to the final location.

During this, I was praying and felt like I was supposed to pay the tithe of what we were wanting to do by purchasing 200 new books. So in the middle of February, I found the Scholastic $1 sale, chose 200 titles as if they were the only ones I would be able to take over on the summer trip. The 10 year old quadruplets that I live with prayed with me over the books when they arrived, and we asked for God to multiply them.



The Quads with the tithe books.



My journal entries from the date we prayed for the 200 books to multiply by 20 (2/28/16) to a week later when we got the call that the 200 books could indeed multiply to 20,000. (3/3/16).

The following Tuesday, my buddy Chris, (yes, another Chris who I met in Thailand years ago and we both happened to move to Nashville) called and said that the soccer league he plays for in Nashville wanted to hold a

drive for us to donate gear to our footballers in Birikani. The soccer guys in Birikani received new matching team jersey's the previous year from the help of one of my 2nd grade students, Jack, soccer balls donated by my 2nd grade class, and the kids got shoes and matching kits from local children's teams set up by the quad's mom, Ann. The guys in Nashville were moved by this and wanted to join in. I called Jenn and we agreed that it was so important to get the soccer gear to the guys and we'd figure out some way to do so. Soccer has become a way to connect to the men, who have not had any formal education, where the school can't.



Jersey's and ball donated by students.



Birikani team. Jersey's donated by a 2nd grade student with his Christmas money.

At this point on March 1, 2016, there were no shipping leads, no call backs, nothing we could afford, and we knew time was ticking due to the complicated matter international shipping can be. The pressure was mounting as more donations of books and gear were coming in and we had no way at this point to get them over rather than our suitcases.

Exactly one week after we prayed for the tithe books, on a Wednesday morning, March 3rd, I got a call. The woman on the other end said she had received my message, looked at our website, and said she might be able to help. She said she could help us 1 of 2 ways.

1: put us into contact with their freight forwarder
2: offer to let me put whatever we had donated onto a 40 ft. container and what I don't fill they will fill with free books.

Yeah, you read that right- a 40 ft.container, I don't have to do math, and free books- up to 21,000 of them (I started visualizing in bookcases too).

As we continued to talk, she said she happened to have a grant recently come in that would pay for half of the shipping. If we could raise $5,000 by the end of the month we could ship it. After that we could raise the remaining funds for customs, a shipping agent, transport, and other expenses for the construction and set up of the libraries. I immediately called Jenn on my lunch break to first see if this organization, Books For Africa, was the real deal. Sure enough it was one of the top non-profits in Georgia and had raving reviews. We immediately responded back and said yes, almost as quickly as we said yes to the Birikani land.

BOOKS FOR AFRICA

PRO FORMA INVOICE
Invoice [redacted]
Invoice Date: March 18, 2016

From:
BOOKS FOR AFRICA 26 East Exchange St. Suite 411 St. Paul, MN 55101 USA
To: Sarah Roberts Educational Coordinator Retouch [redacted]

Item	One 40-foot sea containers of donated books (approximately 22,000 books)
General Description of Goods	Donated books
Country of Origin	United States of America
Shipping Destination	Mombasa, Kenya
Port of Discharge	Mombasa, Kenya
Terms	Payable prior to shipment

Description of Goods	Quantity	[redacted]
One 40-foot sea container full of donated books	Approx. 22,000 books	[redacted]
Sea Freight (reduced price)		[redacted]
Container Fumigation		[redacted]

Net weight container is as follows: approximately 41,000 lbs.

Country of Supply: United States

By that evening we had a GoFundMe set up and had raised seventy whole dollars for shipping our new found container over, which was $70 more plus a container and thousands of books that we didn't start with that morning. Raising money for something you love brings out the best and ugliest emotions in a person. "Should I be doing this? Asking this? Where are my friends? Relatives? Is this actually going to work out?," etc. etc are the questions that circle tirelessly around your brain as you lay your head to rest. Walking in the trust of a 'yes' to the Lord was stretched to new heights.

I delight in saying that donations didn't come from who we thought they would, but school children who gave their allowance, their families, birthday parties of donated Legos, a salon in Utah, old roommates, teachers, consignment sales, family, friends, people we never met, etc. In one month we raised $16,000. For us in financial terms, that was a few thousand less than our operating budget for a WHOLE year!



These 2 boys donated their birthday presents of Legos to the school. "Not all kids just want to read and play sports."

During the time of fundraising we also collected over 3,000 books. Students and friends sacrificed their free hours and spring break to level, label, and pack for shipment so that books could be immediately used in the libraries that they probably couldn't locate on a map. We realized the importance of not just dropping off thousands of books left to be organized, but to set it up as a proper library with a sorting system and students becoming aware of what were 'good fit' books for them.











Books were literally being donated by the car loads.



...and trailer loads!

Realizing the magnitude of items that would fit into a container, we decided to just purchase the container itself. We decided we would turn it into a library in Birikani, so it could protect the books from the dust and also hold the materials as we continued to sort them out. The library in Mtwapa was completely remodeled from a timber, brick and mud church into a ventilated and fully finished room with electricity! We were well on our way to having not one, but now TWO libraries.

The soccer league that partnered with us spread the word about what they were doing and soon other area leagues joined in. A company called One World Play Project, who has balls that don't pop and deflate, heard about our story and how we had used their balls already decided to donate us 30 more. The day we packed up our moving truck to drop off our shipment at the Books for Africa warehouse we had 3,000 books, 10 large boxes of school supplies, 793 jerseys, 137 pairs of shoes, 24 sets of shin guards, 368 shorts, 107 soccer balls, 522 pairs of socks, 5 goalie gloves, and 59 water bottles that were to be added to the additional 14 pallets of books that were provided by Books for Africa.



One World Balls



MTSA drive!... the day before we delivered to the warehouse.

After purchasing the container, loading it, and sorting through all of the documentation, the container set sail on the high seas for 5 weeks. It left from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia and arrived in Mombasa, Kenya on June 13th without a hitch. The container held over 450 boxes and weighed over 20,000 lbs.



Nashville to Atlanta and didn't hit a single curve!



They added 14 more pallets of books to our 6!

We soon learned getting it to Kenya was much easier than getting it out of port. We ran into a hitch when our shipping agency was unaware that they not only had to fumigate the container (which we did) for the soccer gear but to also include a document that said it was up to "Kenyan standards." This flagged the container and delays piled up. The shipping agents weren't in a rush to get the people out to look at the soccer items and so it was moved into a shipping storage yard, that is as you can assume expensive and frustrating. Once they got into the container, they realized our items were not met that "Kenyan Standard" but exceeded it and they wanted to charge an additional $3500 in customs on top of the $3000 we already paid. Our agent on the ground was able to talk them down to $500 since the items were going to a school and not into the market. As they were leaving one of the shipping agents saw a box of Bibles and asked for one as they left the container, which we happily gave. We were fortunate in working with an amazing shipping company that fought for us and covered these costs.



Dusty and I with the local shipping agents who helped us get it out of port.



Teacher training with Lego's in Mtwapa!



Inside one of the Birikani classrooms

During the original anticipated time of the container's arrival, I had 2 friends fly over from the states for the sole purpose of helping me set up the libraries. One had planned the trip for months, the other came on a whim. With the delay, both of them missed it arriving, but were invaluable assets during the waiting game of getting it out of the port. In every circumstance, people make the difference, so surround yourself with the best.



What friends!!!!

Two weeks and one day after arriving in port, the container finally made it to the land in Birikani. We literally had to repave parts of the road and build a bridge in preparation to get it there on what are typically unkempt mud roads, and it arrived safely without a hitch.



The bridge Retouch built to support the container



The container and school



Patrick, me, and Pastor Chris



Patrick's son, Julo, my fav.



Patrick and I were simply overjoyed.



A recess we'll never forget!

We spent the afternoon waiting for a truck to help lift and pull it off of the freight, and by the light of the setting sun, it finally landed upon it's final resting spot. The village cheered when it finally landed after 2 hours of working to get it off the truck. It was like a live action movie before our eyes. The dust hadn't even settled before they all got together to sing and pray over the container, thanking God for all He has provided.



Mama's after we prayed over the container

The delay made an opening for Chris and Jenn (the founders, heart, and backbone), who previously were unable to make it for the container's original release date, to be able to catch a flight from Mozambique and meet us the night the container was released. Together with other Pastors, teachers, soccer players, and mamas from the village, we were able to unpack and set up the library the next day by lunch time. We trained the teachers, let the kids hold books for the very first time, watched a soccer match, and ate lunch with everybody inside of our new container library. The container was renamed Birka la Elimu, meaning 'portal of education.'





Pastor Christopher



First things first!



We couldn't believe how well everything traveled!



The footballers with their new gear!



The Pastor's telling me how to decorate. Bless them.



The library up front, with 14 more pallets of BOOKS and soccer gear in the back.



Chris reading them their first story.





Now, this is a room with a view!



Our teachers in Birikani.

We hired a van and loaded down the Pastor's van with books and supplies for the library in Mtwapa and head back into town. Two days later the library in Mtwapa was finished. We hired a teacher from the school to be our librarian and trained him on how to level and organize the library. He will continue to add books from the container and keep both libraries organized and growing.



Seth our Librarian!



The Books for Africa books were INCREDIBLE!



Eternal Christmas.



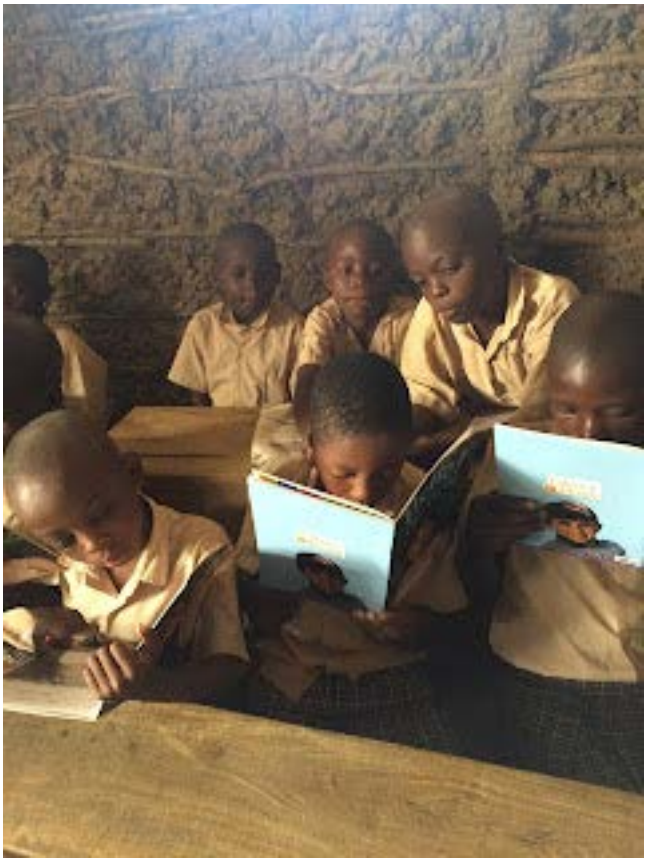
Just the beginning!

We have so many books that we intend on sharing them with local schools along with a new soccer ball. The men and youth in the area are setting up a league of their own to play on. It is our dream that one day we will have a permanent professional soccer field to go along side our growing school and church.



Birikani team about to play a match with their new cleats and ball

To this day, it is still surreal that there is a container on the land in Birikani. We also know that this is just the beginning of what is to come for our communities in Kenya. We have learned that this journey is not meant to be done alone. Many hands make light work, and open up space to exceed our wildest dreams. Because of communities connecting, it is becoming normal for kids to have books at school, the supplies they need, and the equipment they need to play. Our goal is to make the ordinary extraordinary, and the extraordinary ordinary.



Students reading the guided readers from their library.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." Ephesians 3:20

